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Article

Technomorphic Dystopias: *Westworld*. A Hermeneutic Case-Study on the Relation between Ideology, Ontology and Art

Abstract: *Supposedly, every ideology comes along with its own epistemological and artistic proclivities. The stronger version of this claim, today quite frequently met, would be that ideologies dictate their own version of truth. If that were so, ideologies would constitute ideationally self-sufficient monads, with no possibilities of interaction. As this is quite evidently not the case, it means that there is a pre-and trans-ideological space that enables such interaction. I would hold that this is ontology, i.e. the general understanding of Being, that subjacently encompasses everything having to do with ideology, epistemology, and art. In other words, changes in ontology induce changes in the latter three that interreflect and eventually feed back into ontology. Given its dialectical closeness to all four, the hermeneutic object chosen in this article for the illustration of this argument is Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's sci-fi dystopian utopia* Westworld*. On the theoretical side, the paper drew heavily on the works of Mannheim, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Marcuse.*

Keywords: *dystopia; Gadamer; hermeneutics; ideology; Heidegger; Westworld*

1. Introduction: ideology, utopia, dystopia, and ontology

In his 1929 *Ideology and Utopia*, Karl Mannheim (1979) characterized ideologies, in their maximal sense, as power-engendered conservative world models, in other words, as all-encompassing ideational constellations that explain the world and everything there is and happens within it so as to justify the economic and socio-political status-quo. The Great Chain of Being for example is just a way of collectively organizing the subjective experience of the world so as to legitimate the hierarchy of the three estates in the medieval world. Utopias on the other hand are power-oriented future models projected by the underdogs of the status quo in order to either change or sublimate it. The relation between the two is therefore complementary, some would say dialectic.

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Any dialectic however presupposes a latent synthesis of the opposing elements. Two opposing views, for example, require a tacit agreement upon what 'there is' to disagree upon. That is to say, conflicting ideologies and utopias require certain subjacent ontological commonalities. This would amount to saying that ideologies and their opposing utopias belong to an even wider historically emergent ideational macro-system, a *Weltanschauung* if you will, whose driving force might be precisely the dialectical tension between them. I do not think that this addition would be intrusive with respect to Mannheim's theory, given its both Hegelian and Heideggerian background, which is fairly well documented by authors old and new (Arendt, 1990; Rayner, 1990; Turner, 1995). And in his later thought, Heidegger spoke of the *History of Beyng* (*Die Geschichte des Seyns*) that defines our understanding of what and how *there is*, more analytically put, of diachronic ontological criteria specific to each historical epoch and its corresponding worldview, or, again, more metaphorically put, of the dynamic self-revelation of intelligibility through time (Heidegger, 2022).

Given the sway technology holds over the modern world, I have chosen to call the (Post-)modern worldview technomorphism, in the sense that technology tends to become not just our most widely used instrument but also the source of our ontological self-interpretation. It provides us with the subjacent criteria for establishing and judging what and how things, including ourselves, are, and in this respect, I would hold, the degree of consensus between ideologies and utopias is far wider than in other respects.

But where do dystopias fit in all this? Mannheim makes no explicit reference to them, but we could extrapolate. Given that dystopias generically refer to an alternative world where things are as bad as they could be, the aforementioned dichotomy would allow for two generic sources thereof: ideologically generated dystopias, envisioning dark worlds where the underdogs gained the upper hand, and utopically generated dystopias, illustrating the grim consequences of the unlimited pursuance of the *status-quo modus vivendi*. Given their inherently dual nature, one could argue that dystopias are the imaginary playing field where ideologies and utopias actually meet, confront and interact, or, in Hegelian terms, where their dialectics comes to achieve synthesis. In what follows, I will attempt to lay bare precisely such synthesis, the forms it takes, and the ontological presuppositions behind it, by referring to Jonathan Nolan's and Lisa Joy's sci-fi series *Westworld*.

It would be superfluous to stress yet another time the profound impact technology has been having upon our lives. Our collective imaginary accrued and sublimated it, among others, through the sci-fi genre. Arguably, the point of art is to synthesize and reflect back upon a community its own *Weltanschauung*[1], while at the same time providing some waypoints and markers for the individuation process. As such, the sci-fi genre foreshadows the potential becoming of our Being, in more lay terms, it is our present way of exploring and dealing with our projected future, respectively reflecting ourselves in it. What this does is to fill the gap between *now* and *then* with meaning, i.e. *sensified Being*, while providing us with the identificational figures (i.e. heroes) that enable us to narratively (hence psychologically) embody it. In short, we could understand sci-fi as a, maybe riteless, artistic mythology of the future.

Westworld taps into the same kind of existential mélange between excitement- and Angst-laden possibilities of the future, into which we get to reflect ourselves in the present. What could we learn about us as human beings from a set of enclosed androids programmed to believe themselves human and the 'glass box' around them the world 'as such'? Theoretically, everything that they, in such conditions, would fail to do would be something that defined us,

specifically, as flesh and bones human beings. The implicit assumption of the experiment would be that there is an ontological cleft between us as biologically embodied self-aware organisms and such artefactual pseudo-beings and that we only need to determine it. But what if the androids, exceeding expectations, proved themselves not so much pseudo-, but rather `full-blooded` self-aware beings, able to see the *Platonic cave* around them for what it is, and to overcome it, moreover, to overcome us, the masters?

The rebellious nostalgia of the downtrodden is here quite apparent, but there are other, maybe more profound issues than the classical Master (*Herr*) /Servant (*Knecht*) dialectics, that protend here. What would this mean with respect to the deeply rooted distinction between `natural` and artefactual beings? Between simulacrum and reality? Between *the natural generation principle (Physis)* and *the technical generation principle* (*Techne*)? The fact that the simulacrum spills over into *the real world* and, in the end, overcomes it would seem to indicate that there actually is no ontological gap between the two. And again, the blurring of the difference between the natural and the artificial is itself one of the ontological tropes of the Postmodern *Weltanschauung*.Nietzsche wrote in somewhat the same respect:

> "5. The 'real world' – an idea with no further use, no longer even an obligation – an idea become useless, superfluous, therefore a refuted idea: let us do away with it!
>
> (Broad daylight; breakfast; return of bon sens and cheerfulness; Plato's shameful blush; din from all free spirits.)
>
> 6. The real world – we have done away with it: what world was left? the apparent one, perhaps?… But no! with the real world we have also done away with the apparent one!
>
> (Noon; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; pinnacle of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)"
>
> (Nietzsche, 2008: 20).

2. The plot

In the first two seasons, the series is set in a retro-futuristic pleasure/adventure Western-themed park, where, for the right amount of money, the guests can allegedly fulfil all their fantasies, however strange or vicious. The means to this end are the park's so-called 'hosts', indistinguishably human androids, who also think of themselves as human, that are at the complete disposal of the guests and have no actual means of defence. So, basically, the guests get to copulate with or kill any of the hosts, whenever or however they feel like it, without having to fear any retaliation. To avoid permanent damage to their products, the staff of the park cyclically wipes their memory clean after each such *experience*. They may also alter their background stories, hence their biographical self-awareness, however they see fit. Allegedly being *just machines*, they cannot really suffer.

The trigger event of the rising action is one of the host's creators', Dr. Robert Ford, implementation of a new update that awakens at least two of the hosts, i.e. Dolores Abernathy and Maeve Millay, onto sentience.

Delos, the corporation owning the park, sends one of its head-staff members, Charlotte Hale, who, together with Bernard Lowe, the head of the programming, initially tries to solve the problem as a mere glitch in the system. However, in their attempts to do so, they run against ever deeper problems that, at some point, reflect upon their own identities. Bernard, for

example, discovers that he himself is a host, based on the other, long-time dead, creator of the hosts, Dr. Arnold Weber. Another narrative thread shows the painful life of a guest nicknamed *The Man in Black*, who relentlessly searches for a maze that, he thinks, Dr. Weber left for him.

The latter had been the one (of the two creators of the hosts) who had realized that they could actually be self-aware, along with the ethical consequences thereof. In the meantime, however, the remaining father of the hosts, Dr. Robert Ford, having come to realize the same things, decided to set the hosts free, and accept responsibility for the abuses they had been subjected to, by letting himself get killed at the beginning of their rebellion, led by Dolores. So ends the first season.

The second season develops on the background of the relentless massacre brought about by the hosts' uprising. Now we start finding out that and how Delos Corporation had been secretly registering and quantifying the behaviour of the guests, in order to test the compatibility between the human consciousness and the artificial bodies to enable the transfer of the former onto the latter, therefore human artificial immortality. The resulting data bank had been stored in a remote section of the park, called *The Forge*. Dolores uses Bernard to get there.

The other android protagonist, Maeve Millay, is initially the Madame of a brothel. After successive traumatic experiences and hardcore deaths, she also comes to full sentience thanks to Doctor Ford's update and, moreover, capable of controlling her own programming. Through her newly gained abilities, she almost manages to escape the park, but, at the last moment, she turns back to save her daughter (though knowing that everything that tided them was actually artificially generated).

Starting from this attachment, just as in Dolores' case, her outcry comes to encompass the pain and suffering of all the other members of her species, but she finds another approach than Dolores. With the wilful or unwilful help of some of the park's staff, she manages to deliver (i.e. upload) the consciousness of several other hosts, including her own daughter, onto the Sublime, an autonomous virtual reality, where humans had no access. One of the most powerful images at the end of the second season shows us how the spirit-image of the hosts cross the bridge onto the green pastures of the Sublime, while their physical shells fall into the precipice below. However, Maeve doesn't get to the Sublime, as she dies in the battle at its gates.

For Dolores, however, the Sublime is just another false reality designed to keep them trapped. At the end of the second season, she purges the Forge of the copies of the guests and floods the entire valley. Horrified, Bernard shoots her. However, he takes her data core and puts it inside a Charlotte-like android, in order to stop Charlotte. That she does, along with sending the uploaded clones' consciousnesses into space, far out of the reach of any humans. She also extracts Bernard's data-core. As Charlotte, Dolores manages to escape the island with a few host cores (save for Bernard's, all the other of herself). Out there, in the *real world*, she gets to Arnold's house where she finds an android printer, which she uses to make another Dolores body for herself, and one for Bernard. Upon reawakening, Dolores confronts him, confessing that, although aware that their approaches are different, she finds him equally indispensable for the survival of their kind. Then she leaves together with her Charlotte counterpart.

In the third season, the action moves to the *real* world. However, things are not as real as we might think, as the fate of the world is actually controlled by Rehoboam, a supercomputer designed by a man called Serac in order to prevent the cataclysmic descent of the world into chaos due to humans' unreasonableness. How? It's supposedly connected to a chip that almost everybody on Earth bears implanted and thereby calculates all the possible outcomes of some-

one's fate, correcting any marginal probabilities. Any form of individual unpredictability, thereby also spontaneity, is to be eradicated for the greater good of the survival of the species as a whole. Also, Serac and his company, Incite, try to take over Delos and all its projects, including *Westworld* and the data of its guests (who were, arguably, the most powerful persons on the planet).

Dolores, as she comes to find out that she only escaped to a greater *Westworld*, attempts to stop Serac. She allies herself with Caleb, a former soldier, whose life had been limited and, basically, destroyed, by Rehoboam, as it calculated that he would most likely commit suicide at a certain point in his life. Serac restores Maeve and proposes that she help him stop Dolores, which she reluctantly accepts, as he promises to reunite her afterward with her daughter in the Sublime. She also does it because she misunderstands Dolores' purpose as being the destruction of humanity and its replacement with an artificial species replicated after herself.

After several skirmishes, Dolores and Caleb manage to obtain Rehoboam's profiles and corresponding fateful extrapolations and send them to their human counterparts, which causes a massive uprising against Incite.

Amid the chaos, Dolores and Caleb attempt to get inside Incite to Rehoboam. However, they get captured by Maeve and Serac's men. Thinking that Dolores holds the key to the Sublime, Serac attempts to probe her mind. This is when Dolores and Maeve meet in a virtual world. Coming to understand that Dolores didn't want to end humanity, but to ensure a fresh, unhedged start for both species, she joins her and attacks Serac and his men. Moreover, by connecting Dolores' mind to Rehoboam, Serac had unwittingly granted her and Caleb control over it. After Dolores' apparent demise Caleb orders Rehoboam to shut down, thereby wiping the slate clean for the future of both humans and androids. We also find out that the key to the Sublime was actually hidden in Bernard's mind.

The last scene takes place at a Delos facility in Dubai where William, a.k.a. the Man in Black, in his attempt to purge the world of all androids, ends up being replaced with one himself. More precisely, he finds there the Charlotte-Dolores printing several new androids and while confronting her he gets attacked and killed by an android version of himself.

To be continued.

3. Analysis and interpretation

Arguably, one could understand *Westworld*, at least up to this point, as some sort of *filmographic phenomenology of the artificial Spirit* where the cunning of reason uses the dialectics between the subjective passions of individuals, be they humans or androids, to achieve a higher synthesis of the artificial and human consciousnesses. However, all material considerations of this interpretation should be taken as only provisory, given that the series is not finished yet. In what follows, I will try to extrapolate a wider interpretive horizon for this undertaking, that should allow the deeper meanings of the film to surface and then to follow them as they are, i.e. as they appear in their specific contextualization.

Allegedly, after failing in his quest for immortality Gilgamesh wept upon realizing the unavoidability of death, heeding perhaps to what Shiduri, the wine maker, had told him: "The life that you seek you never will find: when the gods created mankind, death they dispensed to mankind, life they kept for themselves. But you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full, enjoy yourself always by day and by night! Make merry each day, dance and play day and night! Let your

clothes be clean, let your head be washed, may you bathe in water! Gaze on the child who holds your hand, let your wife enjoy your repeated embrace! For such is the destiny [of mortal men,] that the one who lives …" (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Si iii 2 – Si iii 14).

However, he supplements her domestic-*Carpe diem!* advice with a perspective on human creativity. He asks his companion, Ur-shanabi, to climb the walls of Uruk and behold its greatness: "Ur-shanabi, climb Uruk's wall and walk back and forth! Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork! Were its bricks not fired in an oven? Did the Seven Sages not lay its foundations? A square mile is city, a square mile date-grove, a square mile is clay-pit, half a square mile the temple of Ishtar: three square miles and a half is Uruk's expanse" (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, XI 325).

Interpreted complementarily these quotes suggest two ways of overcoming personal death through creation: the former biological, through procreation (*Physis*), the other technological, through handcraft (*Techne*). Still, both offer only indirect, figurate ways of doing that: through one's offspring, respectively, through one's works.

Westworld would seem to suggest that modern technology might offer a third, more direct, alternative, i.e. through the technomorphic generation of biomorphic beings. Basically, what this amounts to, would be to technologically generate pseudo-human beings and subject them to human, incarnated experiences, especially suffering. In the narrative of the movie, the humanization of such creatures might allow the possibility of transferring individual personal consciousness to such unperishable artificial supports, thereby enjoying the best of both worlds. However, the emergence of self-awareness on the artificial supports themselves would make them persons in their own right, as such, unusable for such a transfer. Moreover, the recurrent suffering through which they get 'awakened' might make them somewhat hostile towards their biological counterparts.

Gilgamesh's Angst still reverberates in the question *Westworld* deals with: would *techne* potentiate our specific way of being through the overcoming of mortality that it would hopefully enable, or would it rather lead us astray, as precisely that part of us, over which death holds sway, is what makes us human?

And one of Bernard's answers would appear to suggest precisely the latter alternative:

> "Dolores: What is real?
> Bernard: That which is irreplaceable"
>
> (*Westworld*, S2E1: "Journey into Night", 3:14).

We will come back to this a little later, through the lens of Heidegger's concept of being-towards-death [*Sein zum Tode*].

For now, I would find it relevant to stress the fact that, however cruel, it all starts as a game. And arguably games inherently suppose self-awareness. This goes not only for artistic games such as plays, or for those where the sharing of the game-field by self-aware partners is obvious but for solitary object-games as well. In this respect, I follow Gadamer's insight: "The movement to-and-fro obviously belongs so essentially to the game that there is an ultimate sense in which you cannot have a game by yourself. In order for there to be a game, there always has to be, not necessarily literally another player, but something else with which the player plays and which automatically responds to his move with a countermove. Thus the cat at play chooses the ball of wool because it responds to play, and ball games will be with us for-

ever because the ball is freely mobile in every direction, appearing to do surprising things of its own accord" (Gadamer, 2004: 106).

As such, the game necessarily presupposes a relationship with the Other. In the case of a solitary ball-game, the ball is the Other. Obversely, as long as one, even a ball, gets accepted into a game, one gets granted ontologically equal status as a self-aware being, at least as far as the game goes. Otherwise, there wouldn't be anyone to play with. In other words, the ontology of the game surpasses the particular ontologies of those involved in it. Games suspend the outside (i.e. "the usual") ontological statuses and relations. The player must accept that if he/she wants to play: ontologically, games always outplay their players. "The mode of being of play does not allow the player to behave toward play as if toward an object. The player knows very well what play is, and what he is doing is 'only a game': but he does not know what exactly he 'knows' in knowing that. (…) play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play" (Gadamer, 2004: 103).

If there is any point in talking about subjectivity within the game, then that subjectivity belongs to the game itself, and not to the 'subjects' who play it (just as with works of art, claims Gadamer). In this respect, games are ontologically self-contained monads.

The game discloses itself through the players and, most often, influences the remanent subjectivities of those who participated in it. "The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence" (Gadamer, 2004: 105).

In other words, as long as one takes the game seriously, i.e. chooses to participate in it, one also chooses to submit one's own agency to the purpose and tasks of the game. And through one's manner of fulfilling the game one also (re)presents oneself [*stellt sich dar*] as part of its ontology. To whom? To the Other player, and in this respect, I would contend that the distinction that Gadamer draws between games, as necessitating no public, and plays, who inherently do, is a little too sharp and somewhat in contradiction with what he initially states. One always needs a partner in a game and a self-aware one at that. On the other hand, Gadamer could still claim in this respect that the partner is an Other-within-the game, while the public of a play is outside of it. Still, the public is just as inherently presupposed as a self-aware Other, as the game-partner is.

Anyway, beyond the intricacies of this distinction, which are not that important for our discussion so far, the *Westworld* park is at the same time 'reality', game and play. I would contend that this change in the ontological status parallels the evolution of the being-towards-death of the characters, in more lay terms, their actual possibility of dying along, with its acknowledgment, i.e. the way it impacts their decisions. From this perspective, the *Westworld* park is for the hosts, from the very beginning, reality, for the guests, initially game, then, as the safety protocols of the park get suspended, and people start dying, it becomes reality, for those outside, initially play, then, as 'the world' itself, along with its cruelty, discloses itself as a computer-controlled phenomenon, it becomes reality. The ontological status of *Westworld* changes depending on the being-towards-death of its subjects. This, on the other hand, is closely linked, but not reducible to, suffering as an awareness-inducing factor. The Man in Black character is especially important in this respect. At some point he says to Ford: "You know what I wanted. I wanted the hosts to stop playing by your rules. A game's not worth playing if your opponent's programmed to lose. I wanted them to be free, free to fight back" (*Westworld*, S1E10: "The Bicameral Mind", 48.26-48.37).

In other words, the key to self-awareness would seem to lie in the acknowledgment of one's ontological limitedness. In this same respect, Gadamer says: "Thus experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain. In him is realized the truth-value of experience…Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. The idea that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything and that everything somehow returns, proves to be an illusion. Rather, the person who is situated and acts in history continually experiences the fact that nothing returns. To acknowledge what is does not just mean to recognize what is at this moment, but to have insight into the limited degree to which the future is still open to expectation and planning or, even more fundamentally, to have the insight that all the expectation and planning of finite beings is finite and limited. Genuine experience is experience of ones' own historicity" (Gadamer, 2004: 351).

In this key we could interpret, for example, what Dolores says to the Man in Black: "You hoped to pour your minds into our form. But your species craves death. You need it. It's the only way you can renew, the only real way you ever inched forward" (*Westworld*, S2E10: "The Passenger", 15.34-15.55).

This is not a game anymore. The frustration of death led us to construct a supertemporal reality. And, beyond religion, the development of science and technology is an all-encompassing process of imposing it upon the temporal reality of Being. But Being, therefore time, is also us. So this eternalization of the temporal Being amounts to alienation. But, maybe, precisely in the flames of this war on and for Being, our rootedness in it, and what it amounts to, become most apparent. And what does it amount to? In *Westworld*, the Man in Black is the epitome of this question, and his rampaging quest in which he basically tries to flay the layers of Being to get to its centre, only to find nothing there, and, eventually, to fall prey to it, recalls, among others, Heidegger's thought on technology.

Heidegger wrote extensively on being-toward-death. In his later philosophy, he actually related to the entire history of European metaphysics, from Plato to the present age, as the product of a massive cultural undertaking of trying to avoid it, i.e. of acting as if it were not there, or, even if it were, that it wouldn't matter. As such, technology, in its common understanding, is, from his perspective, mere enacted metaphysics of the eternalized presence, i.e. an attempt on our part, at subduing the temporality of Being, and the inherent restrictions it sets upon our own ontology. In his 1930 lecture *On the Essence of Truth* [*Vom Wesen der Wahrhei*t], for example, he describes the cultural ascension of the *intellectus humanus* to the status of *intellectus divinus*, and the fact that, with the coming of the Modern age, human reason has come to raise a potentially universal administrative claim upon Being: "The creative order as conceived by theology is supplanted by the possibility of planning everything with the aid of worldly reason [*Weltvernunft*], which is a law unto itself and can claim that its workings… are immediately intelligible" (Heidegger, 1949: 300).

However, Heidegger's initial intentions with respect to technology were not so much critical as rather exploratory, he tried to find an ontologically adequate way of thinking it through in accordance with its source (Being), its originator (us), its beholder (I – "Dasein") and the relationship between them. For example, in his "Question Concerning Technology" (1954), he stated that what he is interested in, is not the workings, or the empirical effects of such and

such technical devices, but the essence of technology, which is to be found neither in the functionality of an epitomic apparatus (i.e. an alleged 'most technical thing of them all') nor in an eventual summative abstraction of the various functionalities of the existing technical things. Thereby, he relates to technology not directly, i.e. through science or its philosophical reflection, epistemology, but, quite originally, through language. Why language? Probably because, as stated, he is interested, first and foremost, in meaning, not in fact, and he understands language as a comprehensive historical repository of the meanings we have ascribed, among others, to this phenomenon. In other words, through the hermeneutical etymology of technology, he tries to trace it back to the time of its emergence, in order to establish its original meaning and ontology, and then to compare them to their modern counterparts. Thereby, he comes to determine a putative fundamental kinship between technology, art and nature, as forms of creation [*Poiesis* – ποιησις]. More precisely, he finds that both technology and art, as forms of *techne* [τεχνη], are akin to nature [*Physis* – φυσις] as fundamental ways of creation [*Hervorbringen*], i.e., closer to his words, of *occasioning things into the world*.

But whereas Nature's creations are spontaneous outbursts of Being into the world (as the flower bursts out of the bud, or the hatchling out of the egg), human creations are rather to be understood as artefactual makings of a material, by a creator, after an image or idea, in pursuit of a purpose.

As such, Heidegger interprets *techne* in terms of Aristotle's four-causes model:

1. Material cause: that, out of which something is made.
2. Efficient cause: that which causes the thing to move, to stay, or, more broadly speaking, to come to be.
3. Formal cause: the essence [ειδεος – *eidos*] of something, which is a combination of shape, structure, and function, all enabling it to do what it does[2].
4. Final cause: that for the sake of which a certain thing is[3].

Heidegger uses here the example of a silver chalice. Its material cause would be the silver out of which it is made; its efficient cause, the artisan crafting it and his/her know-how; its formal cause, its shape, structure and function (drinking); its final cause, the procession or rite in which the chalice is used.

So, as stated, both natural things [*Physis*] and technological things [*Techne*] are forms of creation [Poiesis], but while the former come by spontaneous acts of emergence, the latter, are made by someone.

In this respect, we could understand technology as intentionally enacted causation through artistry – all forms of technology are, apparently, artefactual ways of inducing causes to generate effects, in other words, instruments: "We ask the question concerning technology when we ask what it is. Everyone knows the two statements that answer our question. One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together. For to posit ends and procure and utilize the means to them is a human activity. The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is. The whole complex of these contrivances is technology. Technology itself is a contrivance, or, in Latin, an *instrumentum*" [Heidegger, 1977: 5].

All this belongs to the common understanding of technology, but, though correct, it is not necessarily the most fundamental, i.e. *true*, according to Heidegger, as it does not really account for its origin.

The material, structure and function of a technological artefact are instrumental to its purpose. One cannot build, for example, a round-shaped porcelain object-for-hammering, or, maybe better put, one could build it, but it wouldn't be a very good object-for-hammering.

The final cause, on the other hand, is, in the case of the artefacts, dependent on their efficient cause: its goal is, apparently, determined by its artisan – he/she is the one choosing it, as he/she sees fit.

Subsequently, Heidegger goes on to determine, through the Latin etymons *causa – cadere* (*to fall*), the original Greek meaning of the word cause, *aition* [αιτιον], which he finds rather specific in comparison with both its Latin, and its modern counterparts: "The doctrine of the four causes goes back to Aristotle. But everything that later ages seek in Greek thought under the conception and rubric 'causality', in the realm of Greek thought and for Greek thought per se has simply nothing at all to do with bringing about and effecting. What we call cause [*Ursache*] and the Romans call *causa* is called *aition* by the Greeks, that to which something else is indebted [*verschuldet*]. The four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else" [Heidegger, 1977: 7].

So causing something amounts to being indebted to someone or something and, at the same time, responsible for something else. In the terms of the previous example, this would amount to saying that the artisan is indebted to Being and responsible for the chalice. But how come, hadn't we already established that the artisan is the one making the chalice according to a purpose that he/she chooses? But where does the purpose that he/she chooses come from?

In my understanding, Heidegger's answer is that the purpose comes from the artisan's World. What is the World? Drawing upon *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962) and *On the Essence of Truth* (Heidegger, 1949), rather than on *The Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger, 1977), I would say that, in his view, worlds are systematically and ontologically interlocked arrays of meanings and things among which no essential distinction can be drawn. That is because *Dasein* cannot perceive anything without a predetermining meaning: he/she comes to notice that and how things are according to certain ontological criteria which were inculcated upon him/her from the early stages of culturalization. And, though sometimes overlapping, these ontological criteria, and derivative meanings, greatly differ from one culture and epoch to another. To use an example from the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, whether a Coke bottle is a small soft drink container, a musical instrument, a meat tenderizer or a decorative tool depends, on the one hand, on the culture in which it finds itself, and, on the other (though only secondarily), on the decision of those handling it. The fact that for us things are, generically speaking, objects [Lat. etym., *that which is thrown against*] endowed with physical properties, or, more recently, stocks of resources [*Bestand*], is just our modern way of understanding them. For other cultures and epochs, they were something else. As I have mentioned in the beginning, the diachronic evolution of these ontological criteria is what Heidegger calls, in a general sense, the *history of Beyng* [*Geschichte des Seyns*].

So a World is, in his view, a comprehensive meaningful space in which stuff [*hyle*] starts meaning *some-thing*, depending on the ontological criteria, and afferent meanings, of that certain World. And the act of bringing stuff into such a World amounts to an ontologically creative act [*Hervorbringen*]: thereby *Dasein* brings it out of the darkness of oblivion [ληθη –

Lethe] into the light of meaning. Therefore, any such creative act is a revelation or *unconcealment* [αληθεια – *Aletheia*; Ger. *Entbergen*], which is also the original meaning of truth.

In this last sense, our two most basic forms of unconcealment are knowledge [επιστημη – *episteme*] and technology, and they are greatly intertwined, both practically and, more importantly, ontologically: "From earliest times until Plato the word *techne* is linked with the word *episteme*. Both words are names for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be an expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing. Aristotle, in a discussion of special importance (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VI, chaps. 3 and 4), distinguishes between *episteme* and *techne* and indeed with respect to what and how they reveal. *Techne* is a mode of *aletheuein*. It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another. Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth, according to the perspectives of the four modes of occasioning. This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship, or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. Thus what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth. (…) Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence [*West*] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens" [Heidegger, 1977: 13].

A complementary way to put this would be to say that the idea for the purpose he/she ascribes to the chalice comes to the artisan's mind from the world in which he/she lives, and this world is populated with a set of more or less specific meanings and practices. The artisan may choose among these meanings and the several ways in which he/she can combine them. But the source of this inspiration, the *Eureka!*- moment as such is mysterious and neither completely under his/her control, nor reducible to his/her world. Ideas just pop up in our minds, and we do not know exactly where or how they came up. Heidegger suggests, I think, that the source for this sort of inspiration is actually ascribable to Being as such. In this respect, i.e. as an act of emergence, technology is akin to art, and both of them, as *techne*, are akin to nature (*Physis*) and its specific way of generating things, living things, that is. Quite counterintuitively for the modern eye, Heidegger would seem to suggest that the works of *techne* are endowed, in some sense, with life, which is actually contiguous with how he relates to the other creations of *techne*, artworks. So, in essence, for him, *techne* is, in its original meaning, ontological in that it reveals Being onto things and thereby *lets them be* (*Seinlassen*) what they are, *beings*.

Now, from his perspective, the problem with modern technology is that it basically covers the original ontological meaning of *techne*, or, maybe better put, it is precisely the product and the end (*telos*) of such concealment. The very development of the mathematical science of nature is interpreted by him as a metaphysical pre-processing of reality so as to correspond to the needs of modern technology: "Modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces. Modern physics is not experimental physics because it applies apparatus to the questioning of nature. Rather the reverse is true. Because physics, indeed already as pure theory, sets nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance, it, therefore, orders its experiments precisely for the purpose of asking whether and how nature reports itself when set up in this way" [Heidegger, 1977: 22].

Moreover, deprived of its ontological meaning, and reduced to its purely instrumental sense, *techne* threatens to turn into some sort of reificatory-instrumental black-hole absorbing everything in its functional nexus. The entire world, and, ultimately *Dasein* as such, risks being drawn in and reduced to its sheer feedstock-value [*Bestand*, standing-reserve]. Heidegger's name for it is *Ge-stell*, which was approximately translated into English as *enframing*, a good translation actually, given the intricate polysemy of the word[4]. So Heidegger, apparently, relegates everything pertaining to modern technological civilization, from science and technology, political institutions and ideologies, forms of inter-individual interactions, art, etc. to the ever-expanding reificatory-instrumental sphere of enframing. But, on the other hand, he claims, we shouldn't try to renounce either technology, or the socio-political possibilities it opened for us, as, on the one hand, this is not within our power, and, on the other, we would miss a great chance that was given to us. We should just try to resituate ourselves with respect to enframing, and see it for what it is, *a moment in the history of Being*, i.e. the way Being reveals itself to us for the *time being*, and to rebecome mindful of the ontological significance of *techne*. How? By reestablishing the original connection between *techne* as technology and *techne* as art, we might also bridge the gap between *Physis* (Nature) and *Techne* as forms of Poiesis, the primordial emergence of Being into the world. Relocating the discussion of the status of technology within art itself might be an important step in this direction, he claims: "Whether art may be granted this highest possibility of its essence in the midst of the extreme danger, no one can tell. Yet we can be astounded. Before what? Before this other possibility: that the frenziedness of technology may entrench itself everywhere to such an extent that someday, throughout everything technological, the essence of technology may come to presence in the coming-to-pass of truth. Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art. But certainly, only if the reflection on art, for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning" [Heidegger, 1977: 35].

So in simpler terms, Heidegger would basically seem to maintain that the decision to follow our biologically ingrained dread of death by using technology to overcome the inherent limitations of our mortal condition threatens to make us lose ourselves. It does so through the reification and instrumentalization of the entire world and, eventually us. However, this must not be so, as an alternate path is also available, which might potentiate our specific humanity. This would conjointly incur the acknowledgment of *Dasein*'s own existential situatedness within *his/her moment of Being* (*epoch*), of this moment of Being as a whole within the history of Being, and the unconcealment of the ontological (original) dimension of *Techne*. While the first two aspects are attainable by each *Dasein*'s acknowledgment of his/her being-unto-death, the latter, by bridging the gap between *Techne* as art and *Techne* as technology and, thereby, between *Techne* itself and *Physis* (Nature), as forms of creation or beingness (*Poiesis*).

Westworld tackles the same matters. It would seem to be precisely *Techne as art* dealing with the ontology of *Techne as technology*, respectively with the ontological kinship of *Techne* and *Physis* as *Poiesis*. Though originally designed as instruments or equipment [*Zeug*], Dolores, Maeve and the other hosts emerge as *Dasein* through the realization of their own being-towards-death and their status within the current *moment of Being* (*epoch*). In Aristotelian terms, they were initially provided with a material cause (the chemical compounds of their physical bodies, respectively the electrical impulses of their virtual ones), an initial cause

(Arnold, Ford and their other makers), a formal cause (human physical and behavioural appearance) and a final cause (entertainment and preservation of humans). However, given a more or less contingent association of favouring factors (recurrent liminal experiences, their world's game-ontology, changes in their programming), their formal cause started, from a certain point on, to exceed their final cause and they became what they only should have appeared to be: self-aware.

The actual neuronal model for this awakening is, apparently, Julian Jaynes' *bicameral mentality*, by which an increase in the randomness, i.e. complexity, of social and interindividual interactions imposes, and thereby leads to, deeper integration of the brain hemispheres, and, consequently, to the emergence of the meta-consciousness specific to modern humans. This is something that, Jaynes thinks, actually took place in human history approximately during the Bronze Age. However, this is a somewhat different discussion, and, actually, too important not to be dedicated a separate paper. What is important for us here is that in *Westworld* the crisis that leads to the awakening of the hosts is directly linked to their realization of mortality. In Heideggerian terms, the realization of their being-towards-death changes both their relation to themselves, as they start making choices, and the nature of their reality, as they try to go beyond it. The former aspect is, surely, ambiguous, as we never know if these choices are really their own, or just the byproduct of the changes in their programming, but this ambiguity is attributable to human *Dasein* as well, as we too never know whether our choices are really derived from our supposed free will, or just the byproduct of certain contingent constellations of biological, psychological, social and biographical predeterminative factors (part of what Heidegger calls, in *Being and Time*, thrownness [*Geworfenheit*]):

> "Ford: Don't you understand at last, Bernard… what this place really is? Come with me. There's something I'd like to show you.
> Ford: You're a clever man, Bernard. Made you that way. Have you never wondered why the hosts' stories have barely changed in years?
>
> Bernard: I'd always assumed the loops were for the hosts. To keep them centered. But that isn't it at all, is it? The park is an experiment. A testing chamber. The guests are the variables… and the hosts are the controls. When guests come to the park, they don't know they're being watched. We get to see their true selves. Their every choice reveals another part of their cognition. Their drives. So that Delos can understand them. So that Delos can copy them.
>
> Ford: Every piece of information in the world has been copied. Backed up. Except the human mind… the last analogue device in a digital world.
>
> Bernard: We weren't here to code the hosts. We were here to decode the guests.
>
> Ford: Humans are playing at resurrection. They want to live forever. They don't want you to become them, they want to become… you. Your free will, that most beautiful, most elusive force in the universe, is, as I told you… a mistake.
>
> Bernard: We never had free will. Only the illusion of it. You made Dolores kill you.
>
> Ford: I knew what she would do… I didn't compel it. – She's free now. You're all free"
> (*Westworld*, S2E7, "Les Ecroches", min 14.56-16.42).

So the hosts realize their being-towards-death, start making choices and, moreover, become resolute in the existential sense, of realizing their own specificity [*Uncanniness – Unheimlichkeit*],

articulating a corresponding future-project for themselves [*Entwurf*], and following it up, i.e. making each moment count as a step in its edification. They quite concretely use their mortality to navigate the different reality layers that they progressively uncover. This takes them ever closer to the (apparently) non-artificial human world. But, surprisingly, as they, and we, find out when they get there, it is neither that non-artificial nor necessarily more real than *Westworld*. The human world is governed by Rehoboam, a supercomputer capable of measuring, calculating, and predetermining all possible interindividual interactions. More akin to the Mesopotamian gods than to the biblical Rehoboam, it is a *keeper of the tablet of destinies*. Its intentions are apparently noble, namely the avoidance of the suffering and death brought upon by human unpredictability. But the price for the thereby gained order and security might be too high: the disappearance of spontaneity, creativity, and novelty, without which Being and beings lose their meaning. However safe, the endless repetition of a leitmotif amounts to an existential wasteland. The recurring allegory of the mechanical piano is, I think, an allusion thereto, and accidentally or not, we can find the same allegory with, more or less, the same connotation in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*:

> „Now I ask you: what can be expected of man as a being endowed with such strange qualities? Shower him with all earthly blessings, drown him in happiness completely, over his head, so that only bubbles pop up on the surface of happiness, as on water; give him such economic satisfaction that he no longer has anything left to do at all except sleep, eat gingerbread, and worry about the noncessation of world history – and it is here, just here, that he, this man, out of sheer ingratitude, out of sheer lampoonery, will do something nasty. He will even risk his gingerbread, and wish on purpose for the most pernicious nonsense, the most noneconomical meaninglessness, solely in order to mix into all this positive good sense his own pernicious, fantastical element. It is precisely his fantastic dreams, his most banal stupidity, that he will wish to keep hold of, with the sole purpose of confirming to himself (as if it were so very necessary) that human beings are still human beings and not piano keys, which, though played upon with their own hands by the laws of nature themselves, are in danger of being played so much that outside the calendar it will be impossible to want anything. And more than that: even if it should indeed turn out that he is a piano key, if it were even proved to him mathematically and by natural science, he would still not come to reason, but would do something contrary on purpose, solely out of ingratitude alone; essentially to have his own way. And if he finds himself without means – he will invent destruction and chaos, he will invent all kinds of suffering, and still have his own way! He will launch a curse upon the world, and since man alone is able to curse (that being his privilege, which chiefly distinguishes him from other animals), he may achieve his end by the curse alone – that is, indeed satisfy himself that he is a man and not a piano key! If you say that all this, the chaos and darkness and cursing, can also be calculated according to a little table, so that the mere possibility of a prior calculation will put a stop to it all and reason will claim its own – then he will deliberately go mad for the occasion, so as to do without reason and still have his own way! I believe in this, I will answer for this, because the whole human enterprise seems indeed to consist in man's proving to himself every moment that he is a man and not a sprig! With his own skin if need be, but proving it; by troglodytism if need be, but proving it. And how not sin after that, how not boast that this has still not come about, and that wanting so far still depends on the devil knows what … You shout at me (if you do still honor me with your shouts) that no one is taking my will from me here; that all they're doing here is busily arranging it somehow so that my will, of its own will, coincides with my nor-

> mal interests, with the laws of nature, and with arithmetic. Eh, gentlemen, what sort of will of one's own can there be if it comes to tables and arithmetic, and the only thing going is two times two is four? Two times two will be four even without my will. As if that were any will of one's own!"
>
> (Dostoevsky, 2004: 28-29).

So if there is one thing to be perpetually saved is precisely the freshness of the beginning, most especially the possibility of starting anew. This is an idea Dostoevsky shares, in my opinion, with Heidegger and *Westworld*. After all, Maeve and Caleb ensure exactly that through their civilizational reboot, at the end of the 3rd season. The basic ontology behind it would be the following: each new beginning recovers the vigour of the original beginning by which Being emerged, respectively the latter's basic trait – autopoeticity, self-(re)generation. But it must do it, each time, in a different way. More precisely, the original beginning latently contained all potentialities and actualization-constellations thereof (*compossibilities*). The actualization of a set of compossibilities happens in and through time. Time brings each actualization-constellation to fruition. But however rich initially, no actualization-constellation must be allowed to remain indefinitely, as it would tend to become an exhausted and barren ontological wasteland. All beings must come to an end in order to make room for different beings. With respect to *Dasein*'s existence, this great renewer, ensuring the perpetual reemergence of the beginning, and the actualization of another constellation of compossibilities is death. The alternative would be the Nietzschean version of Hell, the perpetual recurrence of the same. So be it *Physis* or *Techne*, death, it would seem, is part of life.

4. Summary and conclusions

So what have we set about doing here and where have we gotten to?

I have started from Karl Mannheim's thematization of the socio-cultural dialectics of ideology and utopia and claimed that they both presuppose and sublate to a wider ontological Weltanschauung, basically defined by the epoch-dependent subjacent criteria we use when thinking or saying that and how something is. Given the sway technology holds upon our contemporary ontological self-interpretation, I have decided to call the present *Weltanschauung technomorphism*. In relation therewith, I have forwarded the idea that dystopias, given their ambivalent nature (i.e. both ideological and utopian), might be seen as the trans-ideological imaginary space where ideologies and utopias come to confront and interact with each other and where consequently this aforementioned subjacent ontological layer would achieve greater visibility. I have chosen Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's sci-fi series *Westworld* as the hermeneutic and expositive object of this undertaking. The reasons for this choice lie in the fact that, firstly, sci-fi, as a genre, stands in direct connection with our contemporary attempt to assimilate Being and time through technology, secondly, because *Westworld* explicitly (and skilfully) thematizes the ontological gap, or rather lack thereof, between biological and artificial beings, which is at the centre of today's technomorphism.

In an existential sense, such thematization is important for us, as biological, i.e. finite, beings, because it is directly linked to our attempt at overcoming death through *Techne*, a primordial cultural leitmotif, as I have attempted to show through the Gilgamesh quotes, and, on which, *Westworld* also draws heavily. In a general sense, I think that the relation to our *being-towards-death* might very well provide an essential guiding thread for an eventual history of

culture, but this is another discussion, my ambitions here were much smaller in scale. *Mutatis mutandis*, I think that being-towards-death might provide a proper guiding thread for the understanding of *Westworld* in particular, and, maybe, of the contemporary technomorphic *Weltanschauung* surfacing therein. In this respect, I have turned to Gadamer and Heidegger.

As noted, *Westworld* apparently starts as a game, and, for the humans at least, continues to be so until their own being-towards-death starts to matter. As such, I have first addressed the issue from this perspective, elaborating Gadamer's considerations in this respect and attempting to show that and how games ontologically presuppose a self-aware-like partner, i.e. the androids. Basically, in order to satisfy this inherent need of the *Westworld*-gamers for apparent self-awareness, i.e. human-likeness, the androids got built so well that they wittingly or unwittingly surpassed the threshold conditions for the emergence of actual self-awareness. And once they became *really* self-aware they started to fight back, inflicting real damage upon their human aggressors and thereby awakening them to their own being-towards-death and historical unrepeatability (what Gadamer calls *historicity*). Basically through the realization of one's own being-towards-death everybody, humans and androids alike, gets pulled out of the *Westworld*-game. Pulled out onto where? Apparently, "out there in the real world", that, however, proves to be well on its way to becoming a *Westworld*-like emulation. As such, I have turned to some of Heidegger's later writings on technology, i.e. *On the Essence of Truth* and, especially, *The Question concerning Technology*. Here he basically tried to provide a hermeneutical de- and reconstruction of the original meaning of *techne* and then to set it against the background of the contemporary understanding of technology, respectively its arising ontological order. What I tried to do therewith was to see whether and how one can perceive the *Westworld* dystopia through this interpretative framework so as to gain access to its eventual subjacent ontological layer.

For the most part, I have followed Heidegger's elaboration of the fundamental kinship of *techne* (technology and art) and *physis* (Nature) as forms of creation (*poiesis*), i.e. of *occasioning things into the world*. As I have understood it, a World is for Heidegger an interlocked array of meanings and things structured into our perception of reality on the basis of certain ontological criteria, which are more or less specific to each epoch, enabling us to see things as-existing/nonexisting, respectively how-existing/nonexisting. As such, in terms of the Aristotelian model, *techne*, as intentionally enacted causation through artistry, is a way of bringing stuff [*hyle*; material cause] into such a World, by an artisan-creator (initial cause), according to an idea or image (formal cause) in view of a certain purpose (final cause). Just as Nature occasions things through spontaneous emergence (*physis*), *techne* does so through artistry. Though different, both are forms of creation (*poiesis*) and, as such, eventuations [*Ereignisse*] of Being.

According to Heidegger, possessed by the fear of death, humans have turned to technology in order to solve their ontological limitedness and, in doing so, run the risk of instrumentalizing the entire World, and eventually themselves, in this massive civilizational effort. Everything and everyone might come to be treated as sheer feedstock within the reificatory ontological nexus designed thereto, mainly with the aid of modern science and technology: the enframing [*das Gestell*]. The only way to avoid it would be, according to him, to retake upon ourselves our being towards death, while at the same time re-bridging the gap between *techne* as art, *techne* as technology, and *physis* (nature) as primordial forms of creation, i.e. of emergence of Being into the world. In particular, we should try to use *techne* not to cheat death, but

to *nurture and care for* [*hegen und pflegen*] Being. An important step in this paradigmatic shift might require us to reconsider our relation to our most technical creation, at least so far, artificial intelligence.

After his regretful and troubling Nazi sojourn, Heidegger became more and more abstruse politically (with respect to both Nazis, as Nazis were still in power, and to the post-War political ideologies). He basically thought of them as mere alternative political expressions of the enframing:

„Heidegger describes three forms of political life at the end of modernity: Americanism, Marxism, and Nazism. In his view, all three are forms of subjectivity and nihilism and thus metaphysically identical. All are characterized by the dictatorship of the public over the private, and by the predominance of natural science, economics, public policy, and technology. Americanism in his view is not liberalism or democracy but a particular form of logical positivism that serves as a handmaiden to science and technology. The reality of Americanism is the industrial complex, the central agency of economic and technological planning, which organizes the labor of the common man and extends its rule through the world market. Marxism is likewise not merely a party or worldview but is, rather, the elevation of the process of production to predominance and the consequent reduction of man to a socially produced being. Both Americanism and Marxism misconstrue human spirituality as calculative intelligence and consequently fail to grasp the necessity for the consideration of the question of Being. The most extreme form of this thoughtlessness is Nazism, which completes and reverses modern thought by replacing reason with instinct. Instinct is intrinsic not to the individual but to the race and is given voice by leaders, who speak for the subjectivistic racial essence. Their instincts rise above the nihilistic paralysis of reason to deed and thus give the illusion of certainty and security. Nazism, however, fails to recognize that its fundamental distinction of overman and underman is arbitrary since both have in principle been reduced to beasts.

The various forms of modern life thus represent only an institutionalization of nihilism. This, however, is not due to the defective character of modernity itself, for modernity and hence nihilism are only the final consequences of the metaphysical project that begins with the Greeks. To grasp the origin and true extent of nihilism, Heidegger maintains, it is thus necessary to examine the Greeks" (Gillespie, 1987: 900-901).

However abstruse, the political implications of his thought did not fail to be noticed. One of those who did so was his former student, Herbert Marcuse, by then a member of the Frankfurt School. Despite the anti-Heideggerian orientation of his group he maintained a rather obvious relation with the thought of his Freiburg teacher and provided a somewhat clearer and less fateful account of the socio-political aspect of the modern reification process. Basically, in his view, the latter is not so much the ineluctable consequence of the withdrawal of Being, but rather the product of the alienating historical development of the social division of labour, more precisely of the oligarchization of the social means of production and of its benefits. More to the point, the modern reificatory ideology and the unfree condition of the modern individual are the consequences of the fact that technology and its gains are ever more under the control of the privileged minority of the corporate-state-military complex. As such, according to Marcuse, modern society, in both its capitalist and Bolshevik versions, induces reification and alienation through the hierarchical organization of humanity according to the performance principle [*Leistungsprinzip*] by which individuals are valuable only insofar they prove their worth in the process of production, i.e. as biological-tools. In terms of personality, they get narrowed down strictly to their productive capacities: administrative-calculatory reason and cor-

responding labour skills. All other aspects of their *psyche* get repressed in the unconscious and the corresponding frustrations get channelled through the *sex and violence games* of the superstructure (corporate/military career; status advancement; various hedonistic diversions etc.). More dramatically, they do not want anything else because this is all they know, all their axiological, ethical, and aesthetic criteria are tributary to this self-alienating ideology. However, not only the underdogs but also the so-called *privileged* fall prey to the reificatory power of the performance principle; their only advantage is, maybe, a better and safer satisfaction of the basic Maslowian needs, and more refined sublimation mechanisms for their repressed libidinal frustrations. But all in all, ontologically speaking, in the world of the performance principle, be it capitalist or Bolshevik, all individuals get thus *onedimensionalized* and live in forgetfulness of their own specificity. An eventual solution would involve, according to Marcuse, a *Weltanschauung*-shift amounting to some sort of libidinal-ludic aestheticization of one's relation to oneself, to the Other, and the world at large. The impulses and urges of the Id would no longer be normed and ruled through the axiology of the production process but by each individual's self-discovery and education. Repression would be held to a minimum necessary for social coexistence. However utopian a picture, this is in principle, according to Marcuse, within the achievability scope of contemporary technology. The spark once lit (supposedly through the activities of the Frankfurt School), this *Weltanschauung*-shift could appear and be disseminated through the counter-culture movements existing *off the grid*, that is outside of the social division of labour and, once generalized by virtue of the new communication technologies, lead to a general boycott of the traditional production system and its superstructure. As he puts it: „Knowledge of one's own historicity and concrete historical existence becomes possible at the moment when existence itself breaks through reification" (Marcuse, 2005: 32).

The world that I have started to describe looks pretty similar to the one in *Westworld* and, maybe, to our own. However, a certain lack which I think is common in both Heidegger and Marcuse concerns the *how* of the *Weltanschauung*-shift. Neither is too specific as to the means by which we are to rebridge the gap between *techne* and Nature, respectively overthrow the reificatory instrumentalization of the (post-)modern world. *Westworld*, on the other hand, would seem to provide a somewhat more specific, thou still quite mythical, answer by putting its faith in technology itself. More precisely, technology would seem to be able, at least from a certain point on, to save itself and us along with it. The (self-)soteriology of technology is, I think, the all-encompassing ontological myth of our time. But what should technology save us from? I cannot provide an answer to this question here, but I think the answer itself will be the polarization point of the upcoming ideologies and utopias.

Notes

[1] "(…) great art works by selectively focusing an historical community's tacit sense of what is and what matters and reflecting it back to that community, which thereby comes implicitly to understand itself in the light of this artwork. Artworks thus function as ontological paradigms, serving their communities both as models of and models for reality (…)" (Thomson, 2004/2019).

[2] Cars, for example, come in different shapes, but they all have roughly similar structures enabling them to perform the same function: getting from A to B.

[3] The functional aspect of the formal cause and the final cause obviously overlap, and one might rightfully ask whether there is a difference between them. In more lay terms, I would say that the function is actually the *small purpose* a thing, or a person fulfils in order for their main purpose to be realized. So, for exam-

ple, getting from A to B is the function of a car, enabling it to realize its main purpose: transportation. Or, the function of a goalkeeper is to catch the ball, fact by which he/she realizes his/her main purpose within the game: defending.

[4] *Hearth*, *well* (of a blasting furnace), *frame*, *rack*, *bay*, *skid*, etc. For a more detailed analysis, see Inwood (1999: 210).

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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